

WILLIAM F. S.

Children of the Far North



Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church
156 Fifth Avenue, New York

Children of the Far North

MRS. EUGENE S. WILLARD

O *THAT* the kodak had been with us in those early days of our life in heathen Alaska! How its snapshots would help you to see the child life as it then was and give you hints also of what it is becoming under the influences of the gospel.

The awkward, hard-to-focus camera of those days, mounted on a tripod, was an awesome instrument to the bewildered native; and of course any posed, dressed-up-for pictures would be worthless as studies from nature such as we wish to give you. We are forced to depend merely upon word glimpses — pen-and-ink sketches—in trying to make you see and know the little “bears,” and “ravens” and “whales” of the big white land.

BASKET-LIFE OF THE BABY

The H'lingit mother weaves from the inner bark of the cedar a slipper-like basket, stiffened up the long back with reeds or slender withes, for baby's cradle. This basket work is covered with a cunningly fitted case of strong, coarse muslin made with flaps below the pillow to button over baby when he is tucked cosily in. She gathers quantities of the beautiful soft, feathery moss and has it dried and ready to use for packing under and around baby in his basket.



The Little Baby Buttoned In from Chin to Toes.

Also there are soft rabbit skins to dress for extra wrapping on the wee feet and legs. Bits of blanket are set apart for the chest and shoulders of the new comer, who is first thoroughly oiled, then wrapped about with his little blanket and slipped into his

moss-lined nest; the feet are snugged in with the rabbit skins and the moss is packed in about the body, then the flaps are drawn together and buttoned over the folded arms and from under the chin all the way down to the feet. Baby's head is sometimes covered by a little fitty cap, sometimes only by a fold of the blanket, leaving the face alone exposed to view. Baby is now ready to be moved about even by a careless or inexperienced nurse without danger to spine or limb. The basket is easily swung by leathern ropes across a corner of the house and, by means of a string attached to the side of the cradle, it can be rocked by a person even too infirm or crippled to do other things.



Tending the Baby.

When baby grows old enough to "take notice" his elders often stand him up in his basket against the wall so that he can look about and see what is going on, though no unnecessary attention is given him, no nerve-taxing effort is made to hurry speech and laughter. He lives in his basket day and night; eats in it, sleeps in it, and travels in it. Occasionally he is taken out and rubbed all over with oil. When

he goes abroad in cold weather it is still in his basket under father's or mother's blanket. In summer, during busy times, such as the fishing or berry seasons, he is set up against a rock or tree out of the way. It is at these times that flies and mosquitoes plague the poor little unprotected face, for the baby hands are securely buttoned inside. Still, this is the safest period of a H'lingit child's life, and I have sometimes wondered if the proverbial patience and tractability of the race were not in some measure traceable to this early experience.

I think all teachers of Alaskan children have been surprised to find them so easily governed, gentle and obedient while yet possessing so much of spirit and enterprise. In common with the Indians of our plains, corporal punishment is unknown among H'lingits as a means of family discipline. Physical pain is given to another, whether child or adult, only as "an eye for an eye" retribution, or as a means of driving out an evil spirit which superstition leads them to believe possesses certain persons.

When a child is about a year old, or, as the H'lingits say, *two* years old, meaning one summer and one winter, he is released from

the basket life and is thenceforth at the mercy of the world, being mainly in the charge of other children who are but little more than babies themselves. They make a pouch of their blanket and in it carry the baby upon their backs; even while at play they dart about thus, seeming hardly to notice this precious burden. Very often baby drops out of his pocket during a game of tag and is hurt. To accidents of this kind more than to any other cause can be charged the large number of deformities among the native people.

KEN-OSH

"Bobbs" for short. A roly poly dumpling of a boy was he when, on his own sturdy legs—scorning even the convenient aid which his young mother's skirt might have afforded him through a grasping baby hand—he came manfully at the age of four years to find "a place in the minister's house," as he always said. And though it was a pretty full house at all times, he soon made a big place for himself in the house and in the hearts as well.

There was a rule, of course, that the "Home" children should go to visit their native friends only at certain times and by the express permission of their teachers, but on one bright day soon after the entrance of "Bobbs," this independent baby took with him another boy of the same age and adventured forth to see his folks and withal to be fed on native dainties. His mother brought them back, sorely distressed at what she imagined as possible results in severe punishment. Her apprehension was so great that we had her remain to see how the little culprits fared. After telling them of the good God who had made them and who still loved them so much that he wanted them to be good and happy, the mission mother added that



Children with their "Mission Mother."

the same good God had made each child a little *chief*, to be *master* over his own tongue and hands and feet so that they should be made to say and to do exactly what was *right* and so be well and

happy, which was *good*. When the little chief allowed them to do wrong they were sick, that was *naughty*. Now it was plain these little *feet* were sick and would have to go to bed until they were better—*well* again. So the erring little feet were bathed and done up in white bandages, their wondering little “chiefs” regarding the procedure with curious and tender interest—all fear having fled away. Then we asked the dear Heavenly Father who made them to bless both the little sick feet and their masters, and to help them to be well and more wise in obeying.

The amazed young mother, whose hasty temper had been tried to the limit by her little son’s offense, looked on with filling eyes and little exclamations that showed a heart as warm as her temper.

Though “Bobbs” remained in the mission until he became a man, his first disobedience, so far as I can recollect, was his last. He was his own chief monitor as to the observance of the simple rules of the home.

A year after his coming into the home “Bobbs” had a very serious illness, so serious indeed that we feared he might not get well again. The white mother took him into her own room to nurse and called in his adoring H’lingit mother to stay, that she might have the comfort of helping to care for her only child and also that she might see what the missionaries did for him. She was herself scrupulously clean and neat in her new cotton print dress; and she accepted gladly the white nurse’s apron provided for her. It seemed in keeping with the cleanliness of the nursery and of the little white-robed patient in his white cot. The contrast with the condition of the sick in the old-fashioned native house could not fail to be noticed. We expected the baby boy to prefer his natural mother’s attentions, but when she brought the nourishment prepared for him, “Bobbs” would ask to be fed by the mission mother. When he became restless with pain he would plead: “Put me in my white mother’s arms, she makes me better.” So the white mother rocked him singing the “Jesus Loves Me” lullaby, until he fell asleep and was taken into the loving bosom of his own mother till he awoke again.



There are Various Kinds of Totems in Alaska.

During the rather tedious convalescence, after warm weather had come, it seemed best for "Bobbs" to be much in the open air, and with this in view we had his mother take him to his village home, where she could give him her whole attention and many pleasures dear to the native heart, such as canoeing, fishing and gathering wild berries. When she made up a little bed for him and said, "See your nice bed and soft feather pillows," he answered with a homesick quiver in his voice, "But I want my *own* little *white* bed, and my *dear little* strawpillow!" Nevertheless he said his little night time prayer and went to sleep quietly.



Winter Sport in Alaska.

Each day found him gaining strength under his mother's tender care and the healing of the big out-of-doors, and she proudly, thankfully brought him back to us before the summer was fully gone.

Quick to learn, reliable, energetic and independent, when he came to be also a disciple of the Lord his influence was very helpful among the younger children and he was able to *steady* the weaker and less enlightened of the older boys. He became proficient in many kinds of work and was able with his hands to make a good living for his family when such responsibility came to him. But his knowledge of English and the goodly fund of general information that he had attained made him valuable to the Government, and he became court interpreter, a position that he has held with honor for a number of years.

UNDAH

A great feast was being held by one of the more southern H'lingit tribes. Kindred clans from a distance had gathered in large numbers as guests at this celebration in the island settlement.

Quantities of "hootsanoo" had been furnished as a part of the entertainment and it soon furnished its usual scenes of disorder. The dwellings were filled with men and women who had danced and drank, then drank and danced again, until now, from the combined effects of drink and exhaustion, they lay on the floor in utter stupefaction, the heavy sleep of drunkenness from which they were soon to awake miserable and quarrelsome.

Outside the homeless huts, in forlorn groups, huddled together, were the children, tired, hungry and desolate, yet most of all *afraid* of what would happen when their elders should arouse from this state of stupor. The older girls of from six to twelve years carried babies on their backs in a pocket of the blanket which also served the nurse as an outer robe, while babies that could walk clung to the scant skirt of their big sister, or sat digging toes into the sand of the beach close by.

Presently a slender, oval-faced girl of eight years arose from where she had been seated alone and apart from the others and came toward them, stopping only to speak a few words quietly to each group as she moved from one to another.

"Come with me back into the forest," she said, "I am going to bring you food and *we* shall have a feast too." And taking up into her strong young arms one little toddler who was lame and faint from want of his mother's milk, Undah led the way to a thick cedar grove back of the village, the willing children crowding after her, until, out of sight and hearing of the houses, she stopped, set the little one down on the carpet of moss and spoke to the others who crowded about her.

"You are all hungry," the child began in a strong but sympathetic voice; "your fathers and mothers would not want you to starve, but they are '*hootsanoo dead*' and cannot know till some of you are dead of *emptiness*, so somebody has got to save you. *I* am going to do it, but I need *help*. I am going to *steal* things to feed you with and I won't have a single boy or girl to help me that ever stole a thing just because they wanted it for *themselves!* The ones that never did such a thing as that can step out here at my right hand." When several of the brightest looking boys and girls had in a solemn, awe-stricken way come to her side, she turned to them and in a lower tone said: "There is more for us to do than to feed the children. We must also save our grown-up friends. You know that every man in the village has his hunting knife in his belt and you know, too, what will happen when the people wake up crazy

from this 'hootsanoo' sleep; before I open the chief's store-house for you to get all the food you can carry back to these little ones, you must go with me from house to house and take every knife and killing thing there is in the village. We will hide them in a big hollow log that I know of in the swamp over there till the feast is over and the strangers are ready to go away, then there will be nobody killed — you understand?"



Totem and Paddles.

Satisfied with the intelligence in their faces and with their grunts of assent and approbation, the little captain led the way back to the long row of houses facing the beach. Two children she allowed to each dwelling in turn; she, herself, directing and encouraging them and receiving into her blanket the collected weapons.

This rather tedious business being at last completed, she threw the bundle over her shoulder and proceeded alone to the hiding place that she had chosen. Having deposited there the entire collection she returned to the children, whose interest and excitement had for the moment almost quieted the clamor of their stomachs. The sturdy little aides stood ready at the edge of the swamp to return with her to the raid on the village. When they had reached the store-house of her uncle, the chief (who was also this orphan girl's guardian and master), she took from her neck a little leather

string on which was hung a key. This she fitted into the padlock, turned it and opened the door.

"Stay out here until I come, it will not be long," she said, and, entering, closed the door behind her. Spreading her blanket on the floor she proceeded to throw into it dried berry cakes and bunches of sea weed, bundles of dried salmon and the little candle fish. After folding the edges of the blanket together over this tempting array of provender, she opened the door and called her assistants to gather

up the ends and carry the bundle to those who awaited the promised feast. Then taking a large horn spoon she dipped berries and fish eggs preserved in oil from the big winter boxes recently filled with fresh stores, filling two smaller wooden dishes which she carried herself and fed to the younger of the famishing children. When all had eaten their fill there still remained a few of the dried fish as a common stock, free to any child who might later discover a vacancy.

Undah then called out a new set of helpers to provide *plays* for the company, whose spirits had revived, and the work of these also proved successful, keeping the children well entertained for several hours until the welcome sight and smell of smoke from newly replenished house-fires assured them that their parents and guardians were recovering their senses and thinking about an evening meal. Then, without provoking much comment, the little nurses re-entered the dwellings, slipped their baby charges into the laps of their mothers and busied themselves in bringing fresh water from the spring and dry sticks from the forest.

There was great wonderment and some superstitious fear among the people when it was discovered that during their sleep every man had lost his knife and that the few muskets also of which the tribe had been possessed had disappeared from the houses. It was, of course, laid at the door of the witches, some of whom the evil spirit of their great god, the raven, kept always in every village to work mischief and evil. The old people talked much and the children held their peace until the weary people had eaten and again fallen asleep. When all had settled into profound quiet for the night, the little maid—Undah—stole out of her master's house, though trembling as any native child would with the fear of evil spirits abroad, and brought again the weapons which she had concealed, placing them in a conspicuous heap on the common road upon which the village doors all opened, for the next morning the visitors would disperse and return to their own places. Not many months after this great feast (notable among all the tribes because not a single instance of serious quarreling had occurred and so no injuries were to be avenged or paid for), the chief brought his family on a trading trip to Juneau.



*A Little Girl Rescued from
Natives Trying Her for
a Witch.*

His orphan niece—ward and slave—of course accompanied them. The quick intelligence of the child soon brought her into possession of the fact that there was a mission school and home for native children in this strange white man's town; also that one day was called Sunday, when the big bell would ring and the natives could come and hear singing and a kind of talk not heard elsewhere in the town.



The Rescued Girl after a few Weeks in the Mission.

Consumed with curiosity and interest, Undah gave her guardian no rest until he accompanied her to the mission, when she readily made friends with the happy "Home" children, whose testimony added to her interest and caused her to resolve at any cost to become a mission child herself. So it was by sheer force of character and indomitable will that she led her unwilling relatives into the presence of the missionaries to arrange for her adoption into the family. To the missionary thus

besieged the man and his wife protested that they did not wish to part with the child; that she was out of her mind to ask for such a thing; that they loved her and took care of her; that they also needed her services in caring for their younger children and "the babies would cry for her," they added, volubly making their objections. Nevertheless without ever raising her voice above its customary note of native refinement and without manifesting either resentment or disrespect to her elders the girl finally had her way and became a happy mission child. Not only so, but she managed to retain the good will of her guardians and the loving admiration of their children, whose hearts also turned with desire toward the mission where their Undah lived in such content and whence she brought them stories so delightful.

In the course of time Undah became a Christian. Strong, sincere and lovely, she was also capable, tactful and resourceful—a valuable assistant in the home as well as interpreter for the mission. Housekeeping and the care of children came to her as by natural gift, as did also the little refinements of manner and dress. She married one of our Christian young men who had been trained as a carpenter in the Industrial School at Sitka, and made the pretty and comfortable house he built for her an object lesson for the natives. When they removed to another village they gave to the missionary

in charge most valuable assistance by both example and testimony, standing as they did for the truth among their own people.

“SLAVE ”

One summer a native Christian woman of our Juneau people took her little children and went to visit the home of her childhood—far away to the westward.

While there her heart was touched with sorest pity for a little slave boy who was abused and underfed by the family who held him. Yet it was not until she was almost ready to return to Juneau that she discovered the identity of the child. His mother had been the dearest friend of her girlhood, of high class in the tribe, yet upon her death, the little son, according to native custom, had become the property of her clan, and so had become the half-starved, overworked, unhappy little child that was now called “*Slave.*”

This Christian woman’s heart was big with love for her own little boys. She felt sure that her people were doing a wrong and perceiving that the only way to right it was for her to get the child into the hands of the missionaries, she sought an opportunity

to talk to the boy privately and promised him a happier life if he would hide away among her *stuff* in the big canoe when she was ready to start for home. This plan was successfully carried out, and after arriving at Juneau she brought the child to the mission, confident that he would be received and cared for. The old mission house was very small and



Some Native Women and Baby in Modern Clothing.

very crowded, yet it was made to hold “one more,” and poor “Slave” became more comfortable and happy than he had ever been before.

But as winter came on the man and woman missed more and more their little “hewer of wood” and, suspecting his whereabouts, they came to Juneau to take him again into bondage. Having traced him to the mission these brutal people presented themselves one afternoon at the mission home when an assistant was alone with

the children in the big kitchen. Mr. Willard had been called away a hundred miles or more and could not be expected back for several days. I was upstairs putting my "snow babies" to bed when, upon glancing out of the window, I saw "Slave" being jerked and dragged along the path from the home door, struggling all in vain against the strength of his enraged captors.



The Modern House Has not yet Displaced the Old Totems.

Leaving the babies at the window I dashed down the stairs and out, putting myself directly in the way of the kidnapers, where I planted myself without a doubt that they would *quail* before me. The native giantess, however, was crazy with whiskey; and as I laid hold of the boy she laid hold of me, fastening the sinewy

fingers of one hand on my throat while she grasped with the other a sharp hunting knife. At this juncture, her husband, who was sober enough to consider the possible consequences of such a deed as the murder of a white woman, grasped the wrists of his wife and forced her to drop the knife and release me.

In the meantime, finding himself free, Slave had gone back to the home only to find the door bolted and the panic-stricken children crowded together at the window, gazing out at us all in helpless terror. When I could quiet them the door opened and the slave boy was saved for that time, though his "friends" assured us in no mild terms that they would not give him up if they had to burn the house or kill the boy to get him. As soon as possible I went to the town officers in an effort to have the boy made the ward of the missionaries, but "Oregon law as found applicable to Alaska" was very slow and uncertain and often failed to "apply" altogether. Slave was virtually a prisoner in the home for several days, in constant fear of recapture and in dread of the punishment which would then be meted out to him; all of which he no doubt fully realized when finally caught, as he was one evening after dark, when he ventured outside the door for a few moments with some of the smaller boys who were unable to defend him. And so *one* little slave, after a *glimpse* of paradise, was swept back into the darkness and misery of pagan slavery.

While the lot of an orphan boy is cruelly hard as a slave, the fate of girls is even worse. Not only the orphan but the girl who has parents as well is, in many instances, given as wife to some unloved and unloving old man, whose old wife still lives and who, with him, needs to be waited upon. Some of these orphan slaves have been wholly rescued and to-day are living free and happy Christian lives; some of them are heads of families that are being brought up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord," while there are others who are still held in bondage, waiting, perhaps, until *you* send them deliverance. Would not *you* like to be of those whose "feet are beautiful upon the mountains?"

